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ERIK SATIE: MEMORIES OF AN AMNESIC (fragments)

1. WHAT I AM

Everyone will tell you that I am not a musician.¹

It's true.

From the beginning of my career I classed myself among phonometrographers. My works are pure phonometry. If one takes the "Son of the Stars" or the "Pieces in the Form of a Pear," the "In Riding Habit" ²⁾ or the "Sarabands," one can see that no musical idea presided ~~****~~ ^{at} the creation of these works. They are dominated by scientific thought.

Besides, I get more pleasure from measuring a sound than I do from hearing it. With phonometer in hand, I work surely and joyfully.

What haven't I ~~weighed~~ weighed or measured? All of Beethoven, all of Verdi, etc. It's very curious.

The first time I used a phonoscope, I examined a B flat of average size. I have, I assure you, never seen anything more disgusting. I had to call my servant in to show it to him.

phon-weighter
On my ^{phon}-weighter an ordinary F sharp, of a very common type, registered 93 kilograms. It came out of a very fat tenor whose weight I also took.

Do you know how to clean sounds? It's a dirty

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1. Cf. Sérén's "Musiciens français d'aujourd'hui."
 2. (Satie is referring to the horse, not the rider. trans.)

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satie 2

business. Cataloging them is neater; to know how to classify them is a meticulous affair and demands good eyesight. Here, we are in phonotechnics.

In regard to sonorous explosions, often so disagreeable, cotton/in the ears attentuates them quite comfortably.

Here, we are in pyrophonics.

For writing my "Cold Pieces," I employed a caleidophone register. This took seven minutes. I had to call my servant in to listen to it.

I believe that I can say that phonology is superior to music. It is more varied. You get paid more for it. That's how I made all my money.

In any case, with a motodynamophone, a phonometry expert with practically no experience can easily note down more sounds than the most skilled musician, in the same time, with the same effort. It is thanks to it that I have been able to write so much.

The future therefore belongs to philophonics.

(1912)

2. THE DAY OF A MUSICIAN

An artist ought to regulate his life.

Here is the exact time-table of my daily life:

Get up: at 7:18 a.m.; inspired: from 10:23 to 11:47. I lunch at 12:11^{am} and leave the table at 12:14.

A healthy turn on the horse to the end of my grounds: from 1:19 to 2:53. More inspiration: from 3:12 to 4:07.

Various occupations (fencing, reflections, napping, visits, contemplation, dexterity, swimming, etc....): from 4:21 to 6:47.

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satie 3

Dinner is served at 7:16 and ends at 7:20. Then symphonic readings (out loud): from 8:09 to 9:59.

Going to bed to takes place regularly at 10:37.

Once a week I awake with a start at 3:19 a.m. (Tuesdays).

I eat only white foods: eggs, sugar, ~~*****~~ minced bones; the fat from dead animals; veal, salt, coconuts, chicken cooked in white water, the mould from fruit, rice, turnips, camphor sausages, pâtes, cheese (white), cotton salad and certain fishes (without the skin).

I boil my wine, which I drink cold with fuchsia juice. I have a good appetite, but I never talk while eating, for fear of choking to death.

I breathe with care (a little at a time). I dance very rarely. While walking I hold my sides and stare fixedly straight ahead.

Having a very serious expression, if I laugh it is without meaning to. I apologize afterwards, affably.

I sleep with only one eye closed; my sleep is deep. My bed is round, with a hole to put my head through. Hourly a servant takes my temperature and gives me another.

For a long time I have subscribed to a fashion magazine. I wear a white cap, white socks, and a white vest.

My doctor has always told me to smoke. To this advice he adds, "Smoke, my friend: if it weren't for that, another would be smoking in your place."

(1913)

(translated by Robert Motherwell)

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AMNESIC

MEMORIES OF AN AMNESIC ~~PHENOM~~ (fragments)

~~(Mémoires d'un amnésique) (fragments)~~

MA 2127.1

I
~~THE AMNESIC~~
~~(Musicien d'aujourd'hui)~~
 WHAT I AM
 (Ce que je suis)

Everyone will tell you that I am not a musician.¹
 It's true.

From the beginning of my career I classed myself among phenometregraphers. My works are pure phenometry. If one takes the Son of the Stars or the Pieces in the Form of a Pear, the In Riding Habit or the Sarabands, one can see that ^{no} musical idea presided over the creation of these works. They are dominated by scientific thought.

Besides, I get more pleasure from measuring a sound than I do from hearing it. With phonometer in hand, I work surely and joyfully.

What haven't I weighed or measured? All of Beethoven, all of Verdi, etc. It's very curious.

The first time I used a phnoscope, I examined a B flat of average size. I have, I assure you, never seen anything more repugnant. I had to call in my servant to ^{disgusting} see it to him.

On my phono-weigher an ordinary F sharp, of a very common type, registered 93 kilograms. It came out of a very fat tenor whose weight I also took.

Do you know how to clean sounds? It's a dirty business. Cataloging them is ^ucleaner; ^{neater} to know how to classify them is a meticulous affair and demands good eyesight. Here, we are in phonotechnics.

For writing my Cold Pieces, I employed a

1. See O. Sore's Musiciens français d'aujourd'hui.

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Satie 2

MA 2127.2

caleidophone-register. This took seven minutes. I had to call in my servant to hear ^{listen to} ~~them~~.

I believe that I can say that phonology is superior to music. It is more varied. ^{You get paid more for it.} ~~The pecuniary return is greater.~~ ^{That's how I made all my money.} I owe my fortune to it.

In any case, with a motedynamophone, a ~~musical~~ ^{with practically an x-ray} phenometry expert can easily note down more sounds than the most skilled musician, in the same time, with ^{the} same effort. It is thanks to it that I have been able to write so much.

The future therefore belongs to philophonics.

(1912)

II

THE DAY OF A MUSICIAN

~~(La journée du musicien)~~

An artist ^{must} ~~must~~ regulate his life.

Here is ^{the} ~~an~~ exact time-table of my daily ^{life:} ~~doings:~~

Get up: at 7:18 a.m.; inspired: from 10:23 to 11:47. I lunch at 12:11 and leave the table at 12:14.

A healthy horseback ride to the end of the ^{grounds:} ~~park:~~ from 1:19 p.m. to 2:53. More inspiration: from 3:12 to 4:07.

^{happy} ~~happ~~ ^{visits,} Various occupations (fencing, reflections, im-
mobility, [^]contemplation, dexterity, swimming, etc....): from 4:21 to 6:47.

Dinner is served at 7:16 and ends at 7:20. Then symphonic readings (out loud): from 8:09 to 9:59.

Going to bed takes place regularly at 10:37.

Once a week I awake with a start at 3:19 a.m. (Tuesdays)

I eat only white foods: eggs, sugar, grated bones, the fat from dead animals; veal, salt, coconuts, chicken cooked in white water, the mould from fruit,

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Satie 3

rice, turnips, sausages in camphor, pâtes, cheese (white),
cotton salad and certain fishes (without the skin).

I boil my wine, which I drink cold with fuchsia
juice. I have a good appetite, but I never talk while eating,
for fear of choking to death.

I breathe with care (a little at a time). I
dance very rarely.* In walking, I hold my sides and look
fixedly ^{before} behind me.

^{Having} ~~at~~ a very serious expression, if I laugh, it is
without meaning to. I apologize afterwards, affably.

I sleep with only one eye closed; my sleep is sound.
My bed is round, with a ~~head~~ hole to put my head through.
~~Each~~ Hourly a servant takes my temperature and gives me another.

For a long time I have subscribed to a fashion
magazine. I wear a white cap, white socks and a white vest.

My doctor has always told me to smoke. To this
advice he adds, "Smoke, my friend: if it weren't for that,
another would be smoking in your place."

(1913)

Erik Satie

(translated from the French by Robert Motherwell)

MA 2127.3

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Possibility

Mallarmé and Painting

by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler

Few poets have had real contact with the plastic arts. It would be useless for example to seek any such contact in Rimbaud or Verlaine. Baudelaire's intuitive understanding for the painters of his time remains unequalled. Mallarmé may be cited as one of the very few poets whose writings on the plastic arts have not only not been transformed into absurdities by time but are, like those of Baudelaire, of a nature to supply us with a spiritual nourishment that nothing else can provide.

Mallarmé ^{wrote} ~~has written~~ little on painting as such, but what he has said reveals a rare clairvoyance. He ~~has~~ made mistakes -- though not too many -- with regard to the importance of individual painters. He looked on the insipid Puvis de Chavannes as a genius, but -- and this is far more significant -- he reflected on the nature of painting as he did upon the nature of poetry. This, for example, is what he wrote in his article: "The Jury of Painting for 1874 and M. Manet" ¹⁾: "How can a work be said to be 'rather exaggerated' when among its elements there is a harmony which holds it together and lends it a charm that might easily be broken by one added stroke? To be more explicit, I might remark that this sense of measure, applied to a painting without any previous study of the dose of 'impression' it embodies, can reasonably be expected to detect any excess, whether the execution be consummate or negligent ... " One is struck by the firm insistence on the unity of the work, ^{which is} the sole criterion of its value, or even of its existence. This unity -- we are re-

1) Published in La Renaissance artistique et littéraire, for April 12, 1874.

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mindful of the conversations with Manet -- has more to do with the harmony of colors in a painting than with its structure; but such was the trend of the period, and particularly of the Impressionists who were his friends. Did he not write: "I am glad to be living at the same time as Monet"? He supplied a prefatory note for an exhibition of Berthe Morisot. He saw a good deal of Degas, who for his part "understood nothing, absolutely nothing" of Mallarmé's lecture on Villiers de l'Île-Adam.

Degas tried to write sonnets and complained to Mallarmé that he was unsuccessful despite all the ideas he had. "You don't write sonnets with ideas, Degas," said Mallarmé, "but with words." An admirable reminder of the implements of poetry, of the specific nature of this art. Another passage in the article from "La Renaissance" shows the same clairvoyance with regard to the nature of painting. "There is a certain matter-of-factness about visual perception," he wrote, "and certain painting techniques whose principal sin is to mask the origin of this art made of oils and colors, are apprehended in an over-simplified way that may tempt fools seduced by an appearance of facility ... "

In this passage I discern not only an accurate definition of painting, but also a statement of what constituted the true novelty of Manet. This painter created innovations while painting. Let me explain myself: for him a white is a white before being a cloth. The joy of painting is stronger than the joy of imitating. By this fact, Manet contributed greatly to the liberation of painting that has been effected by subsequent painters ^{whose main} ~~concern~~ ^{it has been to} ~~primarily~~ ^{to} ~~discovering~~ the specific character of their art and with painting accordingly. To be sure, we find certain beginnings in this direction before Manet (especially in the painters he admired:

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in those of Velasquez' works that are not court portraits, in the late Franz Hals, in Goya, and sometimes even in Fragonard); but only with Manet does this liberation become deliberate. The Impressionists, it must be said, did not understand Manet's need to be first of all a painter. They lost the freedom that this gave him. In their desire to hold their "impression" fast, they were compelled to "imitate" it. Later, Van Gogh entered upon the path opened by Manet. The "Fauves" followed him, preparing the road for all.

Mallarmé counted many painters among his friends. He does not seem to have had close contact with Cézanne. But he saw a good deal of Renoir and Whistler, in addition to those painters we have already mentioned: Manet, Monet, Degas, Berthe Morisot. He had works by all of them hanging in the rue de Rome. There was also a drawing by Guys. Portraits of Mallarmé were painted or engraved by Edvard Munch, Gauguin, Jacques-Emile Blanche, Whistler, Vallotton. Manet, Renoir, Degas, Berthe Morisot, Raffaelli, Rops illustrated his works. Redon was supposed to illustrate "Le Coup de Dés," but the book never appeared. Aside from a few mistakes, Mallarmé's choice clearly bears witness to a just sense of plastic value. He seems for example to have had no illusions about Gervex, whom he often saw at the house of Méry-Laurent.

Mallarmé was regarded as an "Impressionist poet" at the time when, as we have seen, the Impressionist painters were his friends. There is unquestionably a certain rapport between their art and his. Like him, they turned away from what may be called the materialism of their elders. It seemed to them that the outward world could be known only within the limits of their sensory perceptions; but the "impression" they strove to give was

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the immediate, unretouched result of a single visual perception, whereas the "sensation" that Mallarmé wished to transmit was infinitely more complex. What is more, Mallarmé knew that poetry "is made with words," and painting "with oils and colors," while the Impressionists, more perhaps than the painters of any other period, attempted to "mask the origin of their art," to show a real landscape just as they had seen it at a certain moment, rather than a painted surface.

In speaking of a poet's relation to painting, it would be absurd for us to content ourselves with handing out good and bad marks from the lofty platform of posterity, now that time has rendered its verdict on the bad painters among his contemporaries. We must say what kind of painting the poet liked, and we must show what ^{he had} ~~known~~ in common with the painters he admired. But what really matters is something else. What really matters is the influence he has had on painters, both on those of his time and on those who came after him. There are periods in which poetry is at the forefront of struggle, and others when painting takes the lead. And sometimes it is a master, already dead, who ^{belatedly} exerts a dominant influence on the sister art. I do not believe that Mallarmé influenced the Impressionist painters, or that they influenced him. The example of Manet, however, had shown him that one safeguards the purity of an art by taking cognizance of the implements of that art.

It was not until after 1907 in my opinion that the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé exerted a profound influence on the plastic arts, and this influence was closely bound up with that of Cézanne's painting. The art of our time owes a great deal to those two men who barely knew one another and presumably never had occasion to

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exchange ideas.

Cubism, which is the origin of the art of today, found in Cézanne the example that enabled it to construct its plastic architecture. It was the reading of Mallarmé that gave the Cubist painters the audacity freely to invent signs, in the conviction that sooner or later these signs would, in the eyes of the spectator, be the objects signified. Faithful to the teaching of Manet and Mallarmé, the Cubist painter painted "with oils and ~~paints~~ colors." On their canvases they juxtaposed not bottles and trees, but colored forms. They were aware of the "sign" function of these forms, which became objects only for those who knew to how "read" the script. Painting is a script and has never been anything else, but this it has sometimes forgotten, it has ~~sometimes~~ often "masked its origin." The requirements of the rigid construction at which they were aiming obliged the Cubist painters to invent new signs, showing scarcely any resemblance to those employed by their predecessors. If they had the courage to do this, and the conviction that these signs would in the end be "read," it was thanks to Mallarmé. The faith in the enchanting power of words, the certitude that the artist is a creator, which animated Mallarmé, gave the Cubists courage to invent signs which create reality.

Mallarmé many times stated this faith, this conviction. Consider for example this passage in "Magic": 2)

"I maintain that there is a secret equivalence between the old methods and the magic which poetry will always be; I am stating it here and I own that I personally in my essays have perhaps stressed it to an extent exceeding what my contemporaries are able and will-

2) Published in The National Observer, January 28, 1893.

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ing to enjoy. To evoke the unmentioned object in a deliberate shadow, by allusive, never direct words which all equally amount to expressions of silence, is to attempt something that comes close to an act of creation: this act of creation achieves plausibility within the limits of the idea which the sorcerer of letters exclusively exploits, until he succeeds in bringing forth the spark ~~gltttx~~ of an illusion. The verse is conceived as an incantation! And no one will deny that the circle perpetually closed and opened by rhyme, bears a likeness to the rings in the grass drawn by the fairy or magician."

Few texts are more revealing with regard to the spiritual origins of modern art. To be sure, the atmosphere surrounding the beginnings of Cubism no longer implied the "deliberate shadow" of the Symbolist period. The Cubist painters tended towards clarity. Nevertheless, they, too, follow^{ed}ing Mallarme in "attempting something like an act of creation" and "exceeded what their contemporaries were able and willing to enjoy." Today, in any event, their works reveal the "spark of an illusion." If this is true, if they dared to conceive forms that were "incantations," it was thanks to the example put forward by Stéphane Mallarme. To this poet modern art owes a debt of gratitude equalled only by its debt to Paul Cézanne.

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MA 2129

ALFRED JARRY: FABLE

A can of corned beef, chained like a lorgnette,
Saw a lobster pass by who looked like his sister.
He was buckled in hard armor
On which was written that inside, like her, he had no bones,
(BONELESS AND ECONOMICAL)
And under his coiled tail
He actually had a key hidden to open her.
Smitten by love, the sedentary corned beef
Said to the little automobile case of living goods
That if she would consent to make herself at home
Near him, in the worldly shop window,
She also would be decorated with many gold medals.

(trans. by R.M.)